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ABSTRACT

Given past difficulties in reforming undergraduate education through instructional innovation, recent technological innovations pose serious problems in current efforts to define scholarship more adequately and to appraise its quality as reflected in classroom instruction. The appraisal of scholarship becomes even more of a problem as the quality of scholarship is visibly diminished. Scholarly teaching, the scholarship of teaching, and scholarship in general are in need of unifying, organizing, and recognizing substantive concepts and principles that lead to the improvement of undergraduate education by teaching effectively. Some premises for defining and appraising scholarship are outlined. These are based on the concepts that defining and appraising scholarship is a deliberative process and that there are no irredeemable differences between scholarly research and scientific research. Systematic and objective research on teaching implies an implicit theory of instruction. Scholarship should be appraised for its substance, content, and intrinsic value, and neither the scholarship of teaching nor the professionalization of college teachers will suffice without sustained scholarly inquiry into the nature of scholarship itself. (SLD)

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by Cameron Fincher

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DEFINING AND APPRAISING SCHOLARSHIP

by Cameron Fincher

Teaching innovations are often commendable, but there are reasons to be cautious about changes that promise too much, too soon. Even when adopted enthusiastically, innovations in teaching seldom encourage consideration of their eventual effect on the improvement of undergraduate education.

Trends, movements, *and* fashions come and go throughout education and those among us, who freely use the term "technological revolution," should recognize that

> *innovations are indeed changing courses of instruction, but the extent to which they "revolutionize" teaching and learning is yet to be decided.*

In much the same manner, the ambiguities of scholarly research call to question the quality of scholarship in colleges and universities that must appraise and reward scholarly teaching more effectively.

When "teaching machines" were introduced in the 1950s, the behavioral psychologist B.F. Skinner was quite right in saying that, "any teacher who can be replaced by a teaching machine should be!" A few years later professors were regarded as replaceable by actors in classrooms and teaching faculty would be involved primarily as producers, directors, and managers of classroom instruction. At another time programmed instruction would eliminate the necessity of lectures, class discussion, and written exams by testing students as they learned and by permitting them to progress only as learning was amply demonstrated.

As Skinner's assessment of teaching machines clearly implied, instructional technology continues to be more of a challenge than a threat—and technological innovations, if well adapted, can serve instructional purposes well. To gain full benefit from innovative methods, however, educational purposes, needs, and expectations must be clearly stated. On many occasions in the past, the promises of technology were unfulfilled because educational uses were too ambiguous.

On other occasions the appraisal of scholarship lacked: (1) definitions of scholarship that encompassed many diffused efforts in teaching, learning, and research, (2) a better understanding of the various differences between training, instructing, and teaching, and (3) much better methods of appraising scholarship than we were able to develop in the past.

IDEALS AND TRADITIONS

The definition and appraisal of scholarship is *not* unrelated to the importance of ideals in education. The term scholarship reflects a philosophical outlook more than it does educational research, the psychology of learning, or traditional conceptions of scholarly inquiry.

> *The origin of scholarship, as most scholars use the term, is implicit in the freedom of scholars to pursue their intellectual interests, to read and to write without the pressure of "publish or perish" policies, and to discuss their findings and conclusions with others of similar intellect and temperament.*

In times past, there was a leisurely pace to the scholar's life—and, quite often, a more gracious manner of living. More recently, the leisurely pace of the scholar's life has yielded to specialization within academic disciplines and to the demands of funded, specified, and scheduled

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productivity. On numerous campuses, scholars contend with promotion and tenure practices that are more likely to reward contractual research than scholarly detachment and reflection on issues of greater significance. Much too often, the scholar's "freedom to write and to publish" is limited to refereed journals with publication lags of two years or more.

To a noticeable extent, *current efforts to define and appraise scholarship suggest another effort to "professionalize" classroom instruction on American campuses.* One of the expected outcomes is to lend a more attractive transdiscipline status to college faculty in the dissemination of knowledge—and in their efforts to help students learn more effectively. At a time and in a nation where scholars have seldom received the recognition given physicians, attorneys, and ministers, a healthy skepticism awaits evidence that a scholarship of teaching can improve the quality of instruction in colleges where improvements in instruction are needed most. To the contrary, we may find that those already doing a good job of teaching are more likely to adopt instructional innovations.[1, 2]

Within some academic disciplines the encouragement of scholarly inquiry has received a dubious welcome. Academic disciplines have always placed their own particular emphasis on scholarly research and its influence in the promotion, tenure, and salary decisions that are made in departments of instruction. And on other campuses, academic departments are hard pressed to make their own promotion and tenure recommendations stand at college and university levels.

Psychology, *as the prime example, has a long and impressive history in instructional psychology and the teaching of psychology.* Nonetheless, the great majority of psychological research on learning *and* teaching has never crossed departmental lines of authority and responsibility. A thorough study of the frequency with which psychologists are cited in publications on teaching and learning would *not* show a significant increase during the 1990s.

As representatives of the humanities, several academic disciplines have a different heritage in scholarly research and at various times have addressed the improvement of teaching in undergraduate courses. *Each discipline lays claim, no doubt, to renowned scholars who are identified closely with the "art of teaching" in this or that field of specialization.* But with the continuing compartmentalization of major fields in undergraduate education, few faculty members will claim to be an authority on instruction in their overall discipline.[3]

Although the differences between scientific and scholarly research are much debated, useful definitions of "scholarly research" are often impaled on the horns of quantitative-qualitative dilemmas and become unacceptable to faculty colleagues serving on promotion, tenure, or review committees at the institutional level. And if "scholarly research" is unappreciated by colleagues in the physical, biological, and technological sciences, the "scholarship of teaching" is unlikely to receive a cordial welcome.

Other difficulties in defining the term scholarship may be seen in the weaknesses of its foundation or what we can call its "philosophical and/or psychological infra-structure." Scholarly research, in general, usually has a disciplinary base from which to work—and must be regarded as "disciplined inquiry." Within each discipline there is some semblance of norms, standards, and criteria that convey information about the effectiveness of classroom instructors. Within each academic discipline and field of professional specialization, there are general concepts, principles, and practices that reflect the purposes and intentions of faculty *and* students.[4]

Critics can indeed ask: how many times in the past fifty years have promising innovations in teaching captured the attention of college instructors and professors? They can also ask: how many promising innovations quickly rode their wave of popularity—and then quietly faded away?

During World War II many instructional innovations were introduced in the national mobilization of industry, transportation, and communications. And many veterans returned to college classrooms in 1946 with amazement at academic inertia in adopting methods of training, instruction, and teaching that had proven effective in the military services. Despite the active involvement of colleges and universities in training officers, pilots, and technicians for military service, innovative methods of teaching older, more experienced students were not embraced hastily. Academic credit for wartime training and experience was given reluctantly, and dry-as-dust lectures were still regarded as professorially proper.

Further confusion can be attributed to the absence of institutional memory concerning previous efforts to employ technological innovations in the improvement of faculty teaching and student learning. There is considerable irony, therefore, in the emphasis placed on research throughout college curricula—and the absence of research attesting to the quality of scholarly inquiry. The continuing specialization of faculty research interests separates many productive scholars from the learning needs of their students.[5]

In the 1950s references were made occasionally to the fictional faculty member who: (a) expanded the topic of his doctoral dissertation into an undergraduate major, (b) then proposed a master's program in his particular specialty, (c) later proposed a doctoral degree in the same subject, and (d) eventually retired in frustration because his proposed doctoral program was never approved by autocratic administrators.

In the 1990s distinctions between quantitative and qualitative methods of research did not, in any observable manner, improve the quality of scholarly publications. To the contrary, there are reasons to believe that qualitative research actually diminished the quality of scholarly inquiry and interpretation. Too often, it would appear that qualitative researchers succumb to a methodological individualism that relies heavily on personal impressions and subjective opinions. If at one time there was fear among scholars of methodological imperialism (e.g. "numbers-crunching" and endless pages of computer print-outs) the 1990s displayed many signs of methodological anarchy—in which each researcher was his or her own subject, recording instrument, data analyst, and editor.

In the majority of such efforts, *the differences between scientific and scholarly research were greatly exaggerated—and a disdain for science too often became a "personal coat of arms" in the "culture wars".* On more than one occasion, the behavioral and social sciences were caught in the crossfire simply because they were occupying the middle ground.

SCHOLARSHIP AND RESEARCH

The differences between scientific and scholarly research are numerous, subtle, and complex—but differences are *not* always as important as the common features of science and scholarship that are often unappreciated. In the past some of us have taught that the research of both scholars and scientists call for similar attitudes, as well as comparable methods of inquiry. Indeed, we have often taught that it is easier for students to learn scientific methods than to acquire what was known as a "scientific attitude" in doing research. *As an old adage goes, enthusiastic researchers usually get "positive results" and doctoral dissertations always find statistically significant differences.* Whatever the level of enthusiasm or the nature of the research, scholarly studies should be pursued systematically and with a willingness to suspend personal preferences in order to reach conclusions that other researchers, with similar competence and experience, can verify or refute.

Decades of debate, however, were wasted on the differences between the sciences and the humanities and the "technical details" of classifying academic disciplines as natural sciences, biological sciences, social and/or behavioral sciences *and* humanistic, cultural,

or literary studies. In the midst of such debates, the notion of separate and distinct cultures solidified and has been an obstacle to clear thinking ever since. Conceding all difficulties of establishing the scientific concepts, principles, and practices needed for a science of education, we need not rule-out the possibilities of scholarly research that is objective, valid, reliable, and creditable.

Within the various academic disciplines and professional specialties nurtured by research universities, the value of scientific concepts, principles, and methods is widely recognized.

> **All disciplines**—*as a systemized body of knowledge—have theoretical and practical implications, rational and empirical methods of investigation, nomological and idiographic findings, and some degree of quality that can be quantitatively analyzed. Each discipline also tends in the direction of synthesis within a conceptual framework with recognizable boundaries and pathways.*

Within each professional specialty, there is an awareness of, and a commitment to, the advancement of some service or activity that requires closer observation and study—or continued reflection, discussion, and communication. In such efforts, there is often a need for more astute, in-depth, pervasive and mature scholarship that addresses fundamental *and* emerging issues, problems, and concerns. Professional education, in general, places an emphasis on *competence* that has been emulated at other levels and in other areas of higher education. The term competency-based education was used frequently in the 1970s and Alverno College's program in the liberal arts received no little praise and publicity for the effectiveness with which competency-based learning was assessed.

Other innovative efforts focusing on competencies, skills, techniques, and styles were evident in faculty and/or instructional development programs that were established in the 1980s, if not earlier. The effectiveness varies appreciably, but with time and persistence, these programs are eventually accepted as a campus resource available to interested faculty. Many programs, however, are dependent upon outside funding for viability and must go in pursuit of *whatever* the federal government and foundations are currently supporting.

The direction and momentum of instructional development programs are often altered by unexpected turns of events. Those that survive do not necessarily thrive because they are successful—but because they establish an acceptable *quid pro quo* of one kind or another, or because they find a niche with an institutional structure where they are non-competitive with more ambitious campus agencies. Needless to point out, such programs are not noted for their creative, innovative, or productive performance.[6]

SCHOLARSHIP AND TECHNOLOGY

Given *past* difficulties in reforming undergraduate education through instructional innovation, *recent* technological innovations pose serious problems in *current* efforts to define scholarship more adequately and to appraise its quality, as reflected in classroom instruction. Neither a scholarship of teaching nor professionalization of the professoriate circumvents the difficulties of defining scholarship. And the appraisal of scholarship becomes even more of a problem as the quality of scholarship is visibly diminished.

Accepting "a tentative hypothesis" that scholarship is its own answer to diminished quality and threatened obsolescence, we should agree that scholarly teaching, the scholarship of teaching, and scholarship in general are in need of unifying, organizing, and substantive concepts and principles that lead to the improvement of undergraduate education by teaching effectively.

In searching for general concepts and principles that will apply to scholarly teaching and scholarly research in teaching *and* learning, the following premises merit more attention than they have received previously:

PREMISES FOR DEFINING AND APPRAISING SCHOLARSHIP

- Defining and appraising scholarship is a deliberative process that does not run its course rapidly; working definitions must encompass both scholarly research and the scholarship of teaching, as these terms are currently used. The appraisal of scholarship will not await a comprehensive definition; indeed, better methods of appraisal are essential to a better definition of scholarship—and only scholarship can make appraisal more meaningful.

- There are no irredeemable differences between scholarly research and scientific research; each is a systematic method of inquiry, analysis, interpretation, and explanation—with scholarly research more inclined to inquiry and interpretation and scientific research more concerned with analysis and explanation.

- Technology, in its concern with efficiency, often leads to diminished quality; thus, scholarly research must assure quality in substance, content, and product while scientific research must assure quality in conceptual thinking, methods and procedures, and communication of results.

- Systematic and objective research on teaching implies, by its methods and procedures, an implicit theory of instruction. Within this theory there are expectations that: (a) specific conditions can instill a predisposition to learn, (b) knowledge is structured or reorganized for the learner's grasp, (c) theory will specify the most effective sequence of presenting the knowledge to be learned, and (d) the nature and pacing of incentives and rewards are inherent in teaching.[7]

- Scholarship should be appraised for its substance, content, and intrinsic value. Teaching efficiency is not a satisfactory substitute for effective teaching; thus, innovations in teaching cannot be appraised without regard for teachers, students, course content, methods of teaching, and methods of assessment.

- Audience reaction and customer satisfaction are not the only criteria in teaching or learning—and should not be the dominant factor in judging the effectiveness of teaching.

- Definitions of scholarship must take into consideration an extensive body of knowledge needing distillation for a more effective dissemination among college faculty.

- Professionalism in teaching is not assured by the conferral of a Ph.D.—and the relevance of this for liberal and/or general education in four-year colleges is often unappreciated.

- Technological innovations in micro-electronic communications are far more relevant, more promising for efficient information-processing forms of instruction than for the development of understanding, appreciation, and wisdom.

- Finally, neither the scholarship of teaching nor the professionalization of college teachers will suffice without sustained scholarly inquiry into the nature of scholarship itself.

ENDNOTES

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7. Jerome S. Bruner, *Toward a Theory of Instruction.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

THIS ISSUE . . .

The skepticism expressed in this issue of IHE Perspectives should not be mistaken for pessimism. As an observer of numeous efforts to reform higher education, the author is convinced that reform, whatever its nature, is easier to initiate than to implement.

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